

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): An information processing apparatus for managing a virtual space ~~containing a user space within the virtual space occupied by a first user,~~ comprising:

processing means for maintaining a user space within the virtual space, wherein the user space comprises spatial locations that virtually represent physical areas owned and occupied by a first user, and wherein the first user controls admission of other users within the user space for chat sessions with the first user;

storage means for storing the user space, a list of spatial locations and at least one list of other users associated with a chat session within the user space, wherein said list of users is generated by the first user and includes at least one second user denied admission to the user space and at least one second user granted admission to the user space ~~wherein a list of predetermined spatial locations in the virtual user space is further stored,~~ where the list of predetermined spatial locations is designated by the first user placing means for placing the list of predetermined spatial locations stored in the storage means in a predetermined user space in the virtual space in response to an instruction from the first user;

notifying means for notifying the first user when a second user makes a request for admission to the user space occupied by the first user;

determining means for determining, based on the request for admission, whether the second user is denied admission to the user space or granted admission to the user space based on the list of users stored in said storage means; and

control means for controlling admission of the ~~second~~second-requesting user to the user space based on a response from the first user, the response being based on the determination made by said determining means.

Claim 2 (original): An information processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the notifying means is configured to provide at least one of a visual and audible notification to the first user.

Claims 3-4 (canceled)

Claim 5 (original): An information processing apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, further comprising:

storage means for storing first entry information generated by the first user to allow other users to enter the user space;

distributing means for distributing the first entry information stored in the storage means to the second user in response to an instruction from the first user; and

determining means for determining whether entry information used by the second user to gain access to the user space matches the first entry information stored in the storage means when the second user uses the first entry information distributed by the distributing means to make a request for admission to the user space;

wherein, when the determining means determines that the entry information used by the second user matches the first entry information stored in the storage means, the notification by the notifying means is terminated, and the control means permits the second user admission to the user space.

Claim 6 (canceled):

Claim 7 (currently amended): An information processing method for managing a virtual space ~~containing user space occupied by a first user~~, the method comprising the steps of:

maintaining a user space within the virtual space, wherein the user space comprises spatial locations that virtually represent physical areas owned and occupied by a first user, and wherein the first user controls admission of other users within the user space for chat sessions with the first user;

storing the user space, a list of spatial locations and at least one list of users associated with a chat session within the user space, wherein said list of users is generated by the first user and includes at least one ~~second-other~~ user denied admission to the user space and at least one ~~second-other~~ user granted admission to the user space wherein

a list of ~~predetermined spatial locations in the virtual user space~~ is further stored, where the list of predetermined spatial locations is designated by the first user;

placing the list of predetermined spatial locations in a predetermined user space in the virtual space in response to an instruction from the first user;

notifying the first user when a second user makes a request for admission to the user space occupied by the first user;

determining, based on the request for admission, whether the second user is denied admission to the user space or granted admission to the user space based on the list of users stored in said storage means; and

controlling admission of the second user to the user space based on a response from the first user, the response being based on the determination made in the determining step.

Claim 8 (currently amended): A storage medium having stored therein a computer-readable program for causing a computer system to perform processing which enables a plurality of users to communicate with one another in a shared virtual space formed and provided on a computer network, the program comprising the steps of:

maintaining a user space within the virtual space, wherein the user space comprises spatial locations that virtually represent physical areas owned and occupied by a first user, and wherein the first user controls admission of other users within the user space for chat sessions with the first user;

storing the user space, a list of spatial locations and at least one list of users associated with a chat session within the user space, wherein said list of users is generated by the first user

and includes at least one ~~second-other~~ user denied admission to the user space and at least one ~~second-other~~ user granted admission to the user space wherein

~~a list of predetermined spatial locations in the virtual user space is further stored, where the list of predetermined spatial locations is designated by the first user;~~

~~placing the list of predetermined spatial locations in a predetermined user space in the virtual space in response to an instruction from the first user;~~

~~notifying the first user when a second user makes a request for admission to the user space occupied by the first user;~~

~~determining, based on the request for admission, whether the second user is denied admission to the user space or granted admission to the user space based on the list of users stored in said storage means; and~~

~~controlling admission of the second user to the user space based on the determination made in the determining step.~~

Claim 9 (currently amended): A program for causing a computer to perform the steps of:

maintaining a user space within the virtual space, wherein the user space comprises spatial locations that virtually represent physical areas owned and occupied by a first user, and wherein the first user controls admission of other users within the user space for chat sessions with the first user;

storing the user space, a list of spatial locations and at least one list of users associated with a chat session within the user space, wherein said list of users is generated by the first user and includes at least one ~~second-other~~ user denied admission to the user space and at least one ~~second-other~~ user granted admission to the user space wherein

~~a list of predetermined spatial locations in the virtual user space is further stored, where the list of predetermined spatial locations is designated by the first user;~~~~and~~

~~placing the list of predetermined spatial locations in a predetermined user space in the virtual space in response to an instruction from the first user;~~

~~notifying a first user when a second user makes a request for admission to a virtual space occupied by the first user;~~

determining, based on the request for admission, whether the second user is denied admission to the user space or granted admission to the user space based on the list of users stored in said storage means; and

controlling admission of the second user to the virtual space based on the determination made in the determining step.

Claim 10 (original): A program as claimed in Claim 9, the program causing the computer to perform the further steps of:

storing a list of users designated by the first user as those denied admission to the virtual space;

determining whether the second user is on the list when the second user makes the request for admission to the virtual space; and

terminating the notification and denying the second user admission to the virtual space when it is determined that the second user is on the list.

Claim 11 (original): A program as claimed in Claim 9, the program causing the computer to perform the further steps of:

storing a list of users designated by the first user as those permitted admission to the virtual space;

determining whether the second user is on the list when the second user makes the request for admission to the virtual space; and

terminating the notification and permitting the second user admission to the virtual space when it is determined that the second user is on the list.

Claim 12 (original): A program as claimed in Claim 9, the program causing the computer to perform the further steps of:

storing first entry information generated by the first user to allow other users to enter the virtual space;

distributing the stored first entry information to the second user in response to an instruction from the first user;

determining whether entry information used by the second user to gain access to the virtual space matches the stored first entry information when the second user uses the distributed first entry information to make a request for admission to the virtual space; and

terminating the notification and permitting the second user admission to the virtual space when it is determined in the determining step that the entry information used by the second user matches the stored first entry information.

Claim 13 (original): A program as claimed in Claim 9, the program causing the computer to perform the further steps of:

storing a list of predetermined spatial locations in the virtual space, the spatial locations being designated by the first user; and

placing the stored list in predetermined space in the virtual space in response to an instruction from the first user.